

Vignettes in Violet

BY MARION PERHAM GALE



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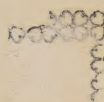
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VIGNETTES IN VIOLET

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IN VIOLET

by
MARION
PERHAM
GALE

New York
HAROLD VINAL, LTD
1928

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THIS BOOK WAS DESIGNED BY ROBERT S. JOSEPHY
AND PRINTED UNDER HIS SUPERVISION AT THE
VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, BINGHAMTON, NEW YORK

TO
MY FRIENDS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Acknowledgment is made to *The American Poetry Magazine*, *The Scroll*, *The Lariat*, *The Country Bard*, *L'Alouette*, *California Life*, *Federation Topics*, *The Musical America*, *The Musical Courier*, *The Boston Transcript*, *The Herald-Traveler*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Boston Post* and *The Winchester Star* in which publications poems included in this volume have been previously published.

Acknowledgment is also made to The American Literary Association for permission to reprint poems which have appeared in Anthologies heretofore compiled by this Association.

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VIGNETTES IN VIOLET

VIGNETTES IN VIOLET

Little songs the heart has sung,
Little thoughts from silence sprung,
Little journeyings in rhyme,
Little tales in pantomime.

Little pictures penned and set
In a frame of violet.

LOVELIER UNDER THE RAIN

Lovelier under the rain

Are the green things growing,
Lovelier the jewelled lips
Of upflung color showing.

Lovelier the weighted trees

Curved to the wind like silver frieze.

Lovelier the lake astir

With wading fern and conifer.

Lovelier young laughter

As it winds the pool-splashed lane.
Oh, lovelier and sweeter
Is new love in the rain!

HUMMING BIRD

Humming bird,
Humming bird,
Boring the blue
So swiftly the eye cannot follow,
Spinning in dizzy flight
Swift as an arrow . . .
Bird of delight,
Oh, swift is your flight!

Humming bird,
Humming bird,
Drinking the rose
So deeply you seem but a shadow,
Brushing its fleckless white,
Lightsome and narrow . .
Bird of delight,
Oh, sweet is your flight!

Drink, bird, and be gay,
For brief is your way!

Bird of delight,
Sweet and swift be your flight!

LOVE CANNOT BIND HER

Love cannot bind her,
She is the wind in the trees,
She mocks with laughter,
Offering these . . .

Rapture of feather kiss,
Golden leaf yawn,
Rose petal bed of bliss,
Jewel drenched dawn.

Love cannot bind her,
She is the wind in the trees,
She mocks with laughter,
Offering these . . .

Song for a lover's sighs,
Sighs for his song,
Mocking a lover's cries
All the night long.

Love cannot bind her,
Try as it may . . .
In robes of misty white
She rides away!

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY MAID SPEAKS

If I could be as continent
As roses at the noon,
As cool and as indifferent
As sails a mid-day moon,
Then I could stir to ready flame
Desire in your heart,
But somehow, sweeter for the shame,
I choose to play Eve's part.

THE MOURNFUL MAIDS OF CARDIFF

Along the Cliffs of Cardiff
The mournful maidens stand,
With figures softly shrouded
In robes of sackcloth sand.

At night I hear them chanting
Their muffled litanies,
Against the Cliffs of Cardiff,
Above the searching seas.

Oh, mournful maids of Cardiff,
Why do you always stand
With faces darkly hidden
In hoods of sackcloth sand?

Why do you dwell in sorrow,
Turned from the world of men?
Know you that a yielding sea
Will give up its dead again?

GREY GULL

Grey gull, on dripping wing,
I know why you cannot sing,
I know why your brave throat makes
But one note that sadly breaks . . .
Storms and partings and hidden fears,
Smiles that are cold with frozen tears,
And sudden prayers of homesick men
Mark your ways . . . what wonder then,
Grey gull, on dripping wing,
That you cry and cannot sing.

I SHALL KNOW IT

This day is bringing a gift to me,
And I shall know it!
It will not be tied with ribbon or twine,
Or marked with my name,
But just so surely as if it were,
I will know it is mine.

It may be the dawn will have violet eyes
And the gold of her hair will blow into the skies,
It may be her dress will sweep pink on the lawn
As she steps into morning, and when she is gone
I will know I have had a gift from this day,
A gift for which coins can never pay.

It may be white driftlings will make me look up
To drink in the beauty of earth's azure cup,
Or may be the swift strokes of sharp pencilled rain
Will fill with clean silver my rock pool again;
It may be a stranger will smilingly pass
Or a gay throatèd bird will light on my grass.

It may be that none of these things will be
The gift that this day is bringing to me,
Dead hopes may start budding again in my head,

Released by some generous word I have said;
But whatever its size, its dress or design,
I shall know it is mine, .
I shall know it is mine!

NOW, AS I SEE YOU PASS

We lingered in the dusk,
The moon appeared
Beyond the hazy lane
Where poplars reared.

The smell of new-cut grass
Made sweet the hour.
I wanted then to speak
But lacked the power.

We talked of nature things,
Of stars and flowers,
I could have watched your face
For hours and hours.

You raised your slim white arms
Above your head.
They checked the ardent words
I might have said.

You were so young a thing,
So sweet and fair,
I wanted, oh, so much,
To kiss your hair.

Now, as I see you pass,
Long years between,
I smile, and dare to dream
Of love that might have been.

DAI BUELL

IN MINIATURE

Your hands are swaying tendrils,
Delicate as Spring.

Your eyes are wood nymphs, dancing,
Birds on wing.

Fingers of midnight
Thread your gossamer hair.

You are a poem, a song,
A flower, a kiss, a prayer.

You are all music,
Everywhere.

THE SCULPTRESS

BASKA PAEFF

With supple thumb and facile fingertips
She shapens flesh from lumps of sodden clay,
Until, from out the formless clumps of grey,
There stands the man . . . a smile upon his lips.
Profound her art, it bates my breath and grips
The heart of me. All flesh must meet decay
Save flesh of stone and bronze. Who can gainsay
The captive beauty of stone breasts and hips?

Of this she holds and more . . . the fleeting glance,
The strength and grace of movement, motionless;
Youth's transient charm is stayed beneath her hand.
Her skill creates, in mute significance,
Ideals of man, that we, who vision less,
May see through her clear eyes and understand.

WHAT SPORT TO BE A KITE

What sport to be a kite . . .
The proud possession of a wide-eyed boy!
To dangle recklessly
At the end of a bit of fragile twine,
Dipping the earth with a swallow-like tail,
Careening madly onward behind his anxious feet,
Causing much eagerness and vexation,
A tumble, as he looks too often backward . . .
And then, facing the gay wind,
To rise and rise and rise,
Higher and higher,
Tugging at the taut string
Wound cautiously around a chubby finger,
And then, to plunge face downward,
Provoking screams and hasty tacking,
And then, to scale fiercely to a higher level,
Up . . . up . . . up . . .
Until the dizzy ether
Intoxicates one's very soul into forgetfulness,
And then, gently, to slip on the bosom of the wind,
Down . . . down . . . down . . .
And lend oneself an easy captive
To a wide-eyed boy!

GYPSY FREE

My spirit is a vagabond,
It dreams of purple vales
And castles reaching toward the light
Like those in fairy tales;
It sings a careless, lilting song,
A gypsy melody,
And scorns to chant the measured notes
That were composed for me;
It dances on a feather cloud
And feasts where rainbows are,
And so I think its pendulum
Is fastened to a star!

PURPLE ASTERS

I will gather purple asters
By a dusty road some day . . .
Oh, let me seek forbidden sweets
In blossom while I may!

Let me hunt anemones
Where low branches sting my cheeks
And sticks and stones lay schemes to block
The feet of her who seeks.

Let me climb a windy hill
To behold a dogwood tree
Caught in a whirl of snowflake-white,
Now, while my eyes can see!

Let me catch a swaying bough
Of sweet locust overhead,
And laugh as someone lays a kiss
Where thorn-pricked scars show red.

Let me buy the cowslips' gold
From a tipsy clump of roots
And sing as water trickles through
My worn out rubber boots.

For aged feet and aged hands
Purple asters roadward stay . . .
Oh, let me seek forbidden sweets
In blossom while I may!

PATHS

The feet of men have stalked with pride
The paths of the world and made them wide,
But the paths that move the heart of me
Have been worn in dumb humility
By cattle hoofs as they patient stand
To crop the grass from the sloping land,
Till winding ladders rung on rung
Circle the hills where their feet have clung.

THESE ARE YOU

Gentians are you,
Deep fringed,
Blowing!

Clear luted notes,
Sustained,
Flowing!

Rain in the leaves of the poplar,
Glistening;
A garden pool ringed with iris,
Listening.

Laughter on the wind,
Grey gulls' flight;
A dawn that breaks
White . . . white!

A fountain stirred
In the night's wide blue.

These are you . . .
. . . These are you!

FORSAKEN GARDEN

Forsaken garden,
Garden of shattered dreams,
Does she return to walk your darkened ways,
Lost to the prying moonbeam's curious gaze?
Does she stand, sometimes, still and sad, apart,
Knowing, the while, a broken heart
Bids this mute garden stand untouched, always?

Mosses and lichens creep over your crumbling walls,
From the stone fish's mouth no water falls
To break the silence of the passing hours
That paint with subtle care the tangled flowers.

Does she return to climb these lonely stairs,
Like white cascade between the cypress rows,
And kneel beside the shallow blackened pool
Where, crimson splotched, the thorn-of-Christus
grows?

How drear the hour must be when she returns
To hear no voice afloat above the ferns,
No laughing song, no waiting lover's call . . .
Only the hush of sorrow over all.

Smiles in her eyes would shine, I think, if he
Would lift this veil of grief and set you free!

Forsaken garden, should she come tonight,
Bride of his heart, death clothed in virgin white,
Tell her another who had love to give
Must watch his stricken face and smile and live!

SHE CAME TO THE HOUSE OF THE PHARISEE

She came to the house of the Pharisee
And wept at Jesus' feet,
A woman whom men claimed to be
Transgressor of the street.

She loosed her hair and let it fall,
A length of curling flame,
And dried His feet, but none of all
Knew that she loosed her shame.

Save Jesus, born of Mary's womb,
He saw, behind her grief,
A spirit woman in the room,
Set free by her belief.

And so He let her spill the oil
From out the earthen jar
And wipe upon her hair the soil
Of hot roads travelled far.

Until her shadow self had died
He bore her kiss and care,
And then, for love He could not hide,
I think He bound her hair.

NICODEMUS

Three times Nicodemus came
To Jesus in the night;
Once to the room where Jesus slept
He climbed a darkened flight;
Once, when the mob was want to kill
His voice proclaimed the law.
"Art thou from Galilee?" men sneered,
Nor saw what this man saw.

Then, when that awful day was done
And darkness hid the sight,
He took Christ from the cross and wrapped
His form in linen white,
And in the princely tomb he laid
A royal gift of spice.
Who comes to Christ through darkness
Makes costly sacrifice.

SUNSET PROMISE

The pulse of the sea,
The trackless sea,
Is surging through the heart of me,
And only when the sun sets red
Can sleep command my troubled head,
For then I know
The dawn will blow
Blue sky, fair sea . . .
And happily
I'll trim the lamps and bake tomorrow's bread.

HORN IN THE FOG

Horn in the fog,
Are you calling to me
Through the thick-veiled lips
Of the listless sea?

Horn in the fog,
Your voice is a knife
That slashes the heart
Of a seaman's wife.

Horn in the fog,
Are you calling to me?
The eyes of the lighthouse
Are blank as the sea.

Horn in the fog,
Voice of blindness and fate,
I can but listen
And pray and wait.

I CAN BUT WONDER

I can but wonder when the wild birds sing
What tenderness is rooted in their throats,
What peacefulness can loosen lyric notes
As gently as the budding blue-bell swings.
They rise and fall in light pellucid showers
Of subtle sweetness on my eager ear,
So void of artifice, so mildly clear,
They seem the very essence of new flowers.

So, wild birds, when you loose your graceful song
In slender trails of lilted loveliness,
I can but wonder if your notes belong
To symphonies of love that none may guess.
I can but wonder and receive your gift,
That laves my soul and sets my fears adrift.

AND YET . . .

Her hair is flowing honey in the sun,
Her eyes are blue as any peacock's wing,
With chequerings of gold and silver run;
Her mouth provokes a warm, delicious sting.
Her cheeks? If apple blossoms could be laid
In magic groupings on time-mellowed lace
Then that would be how her soft hues are made.
Her hands are ribbons deftly held in place;
Her smile is tranquil as a windless sea,
Displaying opal tints within its fold;
Her slender feet, encased in lacquered gold,
Are archly shapened, indefinably.

Now I am just an ordinary man . . .
And yet, she flirts with me behind her fan!

IN A GARDEN

I walked in a garden,
A bright, sunlit garden,
Where larkspur and peonies grew,
Bronze marigold cups
And gay marguerites
And stocks of a violet hue,
A plot of warm color,
Wind-frolicking . . . free . . .
That danced in the sunshine
And beckoned to me.

I paused in that garden,
That riotous garden,
Where curtesied the larkspur of blue.
There, close to the earth,
In the cool of the shade,
Gleamed faces pearl-jewelled with dew,
White pansies, like love words,
Low whispered . . . too few . . .
Just one for remembrance
I gathered for you.

MOTHER

Quiet and gentle is a mother's face,
Softened by teardrops that have left a trace
Of misty tenderness in her eyes,
Sweet and grave and wise.

Quiet and gentle are a mother's ways,
Tempered by service to the child who plays
In careless innocence with her heart,
Still and sad apart.

Quiet and gentle is a mother's love,
Strengthened by faith that none but God can move,
Forgiving and smiling to the end,
Mother, soldier, friend.

THE LITTLE OLD RED INN

WAYSIDE INN, SOUTH SUDBURY, MASSACHUSETTS

Oh, this little old red inn,
With its lilacs peeking in
And its tulip beds in hiding by the wall,
Laughter lingers in the oaks
By the road where merry folks
Of the long ago alighted for the ball.

Oh, this little old red inn,
With its curtains rent and thin,
Oh, this little old red inn Longfellow knew,
Has the same old creaking floors
The same weather-rutted doors
And the same old-fashioned stores Longfellow knew.

Oh, this little Wayside Inn,
Oh, this cozy Wayside Inn,
Holds a fascination for the young and old,
Here the poet's songs were sung
And by many a learned tongue
Were those sweet and melancholy stories told.

Oh, this little old red inn,
Oh, this cozy Wayside Inn,

There is romance and contentment in its air,
Years may come and years may go,
Summer's sun and winter's snow,
Yet its hearthstone's friendly glow we still may share.

THE IMMIGRANT

She has come from Syria to America,
America . . . the land of miracles and happiness!

But here, on the train,
Among these strange, gay, radiant people,
She is a desolate figure.
Her black dress and head shawl
Deepen her dark skin and darker eyes
To a gloomy whole;
In weary hollows above her cheeks,
Her eyes lie submissively;
Her nut-brown, knotted hands
Are restless for want of work.

Her thoughts . . . what are they?
Who can say?

That dark, lost face is as obscure
As the coarse linen bag at her feet.
We may guess that the dingy bag
Holds the cherished possessions
She has brought from her belovèd Syria.
Could we turn its contents to the light

Perhaps we would smile . . . and perhaps
We would wipe tears from our eyes.

So, of her thoughts, if we could read them.
Memories, perhaps,
Vague longings and questionings,
No one to understand her,
She, in turn, understanding no one . . .
Silent days on the train.

Brooding, dark, quiet face,
We fall to pitying you . . .
Perhaps you are pitying us. . . .
Well, it may be there is reason.

APRIL MORNING

An April morning dances on its way
With white-blown sky and jewel spattered lawn,
Magnolia buds, with pouty pink-lipped yawn,
Lift saucily their coverlets of grey,
From pussy-willow perch the haughty jay
A crisp, conceited gossip carries on,
And lightly lifted as the tints of dawn
The tethered plumes of misty lilacs sway.

An April morning waltzes dreamily
On clover toes across the emerald grass
As blythe as any captivating lass
Who guides her step with wilful naïveté.

An April morning burst my mother's womb,
And so I thrill to April's dance and bloom!

THE PURPLE LADY

She sees the world through clouds of amethyst
That shadow sorrows in a purple dream,
Like mask of lilies on a muddy stream;
Her disappointments are like mountains kissed
To mauve oblivion by sunset mist;
Her hopes transcend the rainbow's fairy gleam
Of blue-fused violet; her constant theme
Is buoyed and lifted by a magic twist.

The Purple Lady weaves a tapestry
Of lovely thoughts, like web of gossamer,
To trap each transient thread of happiness
And hold it captive, while her griefs go free
On sighing winds, and so, the heart of her
Sings through its wounds in sweet forgetfulness.

SHALL WE THEN FOLLOW

There is a moment caught in mad ascension
Between two stars in the wide heavens' blue,
Through the long watches of the night's surrender
It waits for me and you.

Shall we, then, follow, when the dawn is blooming
Over the heath, on some brave skylark's wing?
Follow and capture all its unspent rapture
And there, contented, swing?

SWIMMING IN BERMUDA

Lapping turquoise under my chin,
Rushing turquoise threading my toes,
Sweet from the coral-scattered shore
The oleander blows.

Across the sky a cardinal's wing,
Then one full note drops liquidly
Out of the wine-of-turquoise air
To drift along with me.

Who would not share a mermaid's fate
In such a place as this?
Who would not trade a land-born hour
For this swift turquoise kiss?

THREE GARDENS

Within a garden where white roses grew,
Ysolde of the White Hands dreamed and prayed,
Prayed for a ship with northern flag displayed,
Dreamed of a heart that was not hers she knew.

Within a garden, there were roses too,
Elaine, the white Elaine, in black arrayed,
Making her whiteness whiter by the shade,
Unmasked her love and drank her cup of rue.

And yet another garden sheltered one
Whose heart withheld and gave and gave and held
As clouds do rain . . . the gold-haired Guinevere.
Three gardens warmed by one all-seeing sun
Into a rapture strangely paralleled.

Must roses wither and warm love grow drear?

COMPARISON

Through aisles of withered grass I sought the sea,
The silver poplars shivered overhead
Like palsied men who shake, uncomforted,
And wait the hand of stillness, wearily.
I scuffed the leaves that seemed content to be
In dusty piles of wrinkled brown instead
Of gleaming green abruptly pivoted
Against the leaning sky's grey energy.

I reached the shore and felt my unrest fanned
By cool salt air. I watched the fragile foam
Breaking and building . . . building constantly . . .
And it was singing as it swept the sand.

My lips rehearsed its song as I walked home . . .

"Who serves the world must serve it gallantly."

RELEASE

A song went singing on the air,
It twined an apple tree
And blossomed there in pink and white
For all the world to see.

A grief went sighing on the wind,
It sought a wood bird's nest,
And there its stinging ache was stilled
Beneath a wild bird's breast.

WHERE A STREAM COMES DOWN
TO MEET THE SEA

Where a stream comes down to meet the sea,
That's where I want my house to be,
A stream that parts two golden hills
And all its mountain hurry spills
With silver gurgles in the sea,
That's where I want my house to be.

A little house with open door
That gazes humbly at the shore,
A little house with window bright
Where I can sit and think at night
And watch the stars climb up the sky
And pile my day-dreams mountain high.

Where a stream comes down to meet the sea,
That's where I want my house to be,
Where I can still my heart and fly
My soul against a widened sky
Until its sail shall flutter free!
That's where I want my house to be!

IN MAY

The red buds of the maple
Are pursed to kiss the sun,
The daffodils break cloister,
Not one remains a nun;
The swallows dip and flutter
Through azure wanderings;
In May, all life, resurging,
Sings . . . sings!

Faint lilac breath is floating
Upon the dancing air,
Purple clouds of violets
Are nestled everywhere;
The apple bough from moist hills
A pink-flounced garment flings;
In May, all life, resurging,
Sings . . . sings!

Low willow reeds are swinging
Their furry studded stalks;
Gay children fleck with laughter
The tired city walks;

The brooding heart, awakened,
Remembers golden things;
In May, all life, resurging,
Sings . . . sings!

LOG CABIN BOY

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Log cabin boy,
Trudging miles for books,
No lofty station
Nor magnetic looks
Bind you to men
Of every clime.

Log cabin boy,
Huddled on the straw,
The homely struggle
Toward the dream you saw
And captured
Makes your name sublime.

BLACK SONG

What is this song comes singing
Out of the fettered night,
Dark wounded music, throbbing
Upward in flurried flight?

Out of the jungle, running,
Rhythm of bare black feet,
Black struggle and black smelter
And black veins that beat.

Into the cities, pouring,
Rhythm of strong black hands,
Black longing and black laughter
And black faith that stands.

What is this song comes singing
On night's uncovered wing?
The souls of black men striking
A chord on life's bass string.

Unharnessed beauty flooding
The world of men with light,
Black lips lifting black song
Above a stinging spite.

WAITIN' FOR THE DAWN

Waitin' for the dawn . . . comin',
Dawn blooms slower than a late November rose,
Mah soul's comin' when that dusky red rose blows,
Waitin' for the dawn . . . comin'.

Waitin' for the dawn . . . comin',
Want to see the treetops when mah soul takes flight,
Soul might go a wanderin' in the thickened night,
Waitin' for the dawn . . . comin'.

Waitin' for the dawn . . . comin',
Marsa Jesus, make that dawn rose wide and sweet,
Devil am a clingin' to this ole darky's feet,
Waitin' for the dawn . . . comin'.

DANCE AWAY

Wind is in the flowers . . . dance away,
Peonies swaying like toy balloons,
Fleur-de-lis stick out their tongues
 as proud as octoroons,
Wind is in the flowers . . . dance away.

Wind is in the flowers . . . dance away,
Sunflower, yellow face, rolling saucy eyes,
Rolling at the deacon's house
 and rolling at the skies,
Wind is in the flowers . . . dance away.

Wind is in the flowers . . . dance away,
Cake walking hollyhocks shake their skirts,
Spinning their umbrella leaves
 like Alabama flirts,
Wind is in the flowers . . . dance away.

PERFUMES FROM ARABY

Perfumes from Araby!

Perfumes from Araby!

Come buy! Come buy!

Perfumes from Araby!

Breath of blue windless nights

Sleep in their depths,

Sweetness of crimson lips

Lifts from each urn,

Star beauty mirrors its light

In their glow!

Return! Return!

Come buy!

Perfumes from Araby!

COMMAND TO CUPID

Go, gather for me a dew-set ring
Of pink forget-me-nots,
A quaintly sweet and delicate thing
To charm my lady's thoughts.

Go, spin for me a gossamer weave
Of gold and lavender,
A cloak of beauty to receive
The gentle heart of her.

Go, lay a net of tangled vine,
White-starred with clematis,
A snare to hold forever mine,
Her glance, her sigh, and kiss!

MY COBBLER

He has soled my boots
And talked to me of many things . . .
About his family . . .
Six little ones.
The second oldest, a girl,
Still crawling like a nine months' old.
Eight years in a hospital . . .
Eight meaningless years to the senseless child . . .
A lifetime of torture for him.

He does not complain
As he spits the shining tacks from his coral lips . . .
The warm, full lips of Italy . . .
Though the sleek black moustache
Quivers ever so slightly.

It is a wonderful country . . . America . . .
If you take advantage.
Night school?
Yes.
His English is poor . . .
The children, nine and ten, say so.
They are very smart and talk grand things.

The biggest baby . . . there are two . . .
Is nineteen months and cannot walk.
Doctor says, "Doesn't know."
Little baby . . . big fellow . . .
Stand alone . . . eight months.

Times good if you work honest.
"I mak'a da shoe las' six month',
Then customer say, 'See . . . Mike . . .
He mak'a da shoe las' six month' . . .
That's good business."

Square toes, pointed toes, full, round toes,
Press against his leather apron,
Glossy with shoe grease.

His eyes shine with inviting confidence.
As he smiles an eager welcome across the
Mountain of shoes . . .
Russet, black, brown, grey,
Proud shoes and humble shoes
Sharing a common lot atop the bulging counter.

This year his woman will go home to see her mother,
"It is long time . . . twelve years . . .
Since she come to America to marry . . .
Now she go back on honeymoon."

He has soled my boots
And talked to me of many things,
While his hammer swings a constant monotone . . .
Yet never once has he spoken of himself.

In the dusty shop
With its odor of sweated shoes and new leather,
Tobacco, and rubber cement,
As I turn away,
My slim heels beating a youthful staccato
Toward the door,
His cheery, "Come again," follows me into the sun-
light.

It takes courage to keep your light shining
When there is so much darkness.

With neither legs nor feet,
My cobbler whistles as he mends my shoes!

CALIFORNIA HOMESTEAD

A fringe of eucalyptus trees
 Against a moving field of brown,
A weathered house and tumbled fence
 With bougainvillea weighted down;
Geraniums in flaming mass,
 The morning-glory's sky-dipped vine,
Petal confetti of the rose
 Spreading a soft, wind-scattered line;
Fan of the pepper tree afloat
 Above a bright verbena bed . . .
Framed by a ring of golden hills . . .
 A California homestead.

WHITE DESIRE

AT EVENSONG BY THE CONVENT CHAPEL

Above the buttressed wall, a slender spire
Stands, reaching upward into unknown space,
While on the quiet of the solemn place
Descends low music of a languid choir;
White doves take perch and flutter daintily
Atop the wall where rusty ivy runs;
The gleaming surplice of the grey cloaked nuns
Lends to each face an instant chastity
As through the dim arched entrance they retreat;
Their hands are folded on black books and beads
In studied gesture; day by day they meet
The pulseless rite of ceremonious deeds.

Oh, lofty peak, I would with you conspire!
So lifts above myself a white desire!

ORCHIDS

I saw them first in ermine at her throat,
Two purple orchids nestled in the fur;
Her hand caressed the curving banister,
Along it swished her lacy petticoat.
Again, they snuggled in a bed of white,
Shy valley lilies in her bride's bouquet.
How sweet her down-curved lashes were that day,
How deep with love her lustrous eyes that night!

Once more two purple orchids take their place
Within a chill white cup . . . her death-bound
hands.

I cannot leave them there! Her tranquil face
Enfolds a smile to say she understands.

I press them now between two faded leaves,
They will not wonder that an old man grieves.

LIFE'S RIVER

Glide on, oh, river,
Sing on your clamorous way,
By night and day.
Leap as you bubble,
Filled with high, boisterous youth,
Frowning at truth!
Laugh as you hurry
Out through the glorious scene,
Fertile and green!
Glide on, oh, river,
On to the ponderous sea,
Careless and free!

For there is sighing
Down where the wide ocean waits
To blend your fates,
Tumult and chaos,
Bridging the great sea's crest,
Whose heaving breast
Beats the bleak shore,
Striving, yet all in vain,

To reach again
The inland meadows
Of days it could not guess
Were happiness.

THE GARDEN OF SAMARKAND

HEART'S DESIRE

No garden blooms in any land
More fair than this at Samarkand.

Here tall cypress soldiers stand
Against serene vine-fingered walls
And listen to the purl and rush
Of moving water as it falls
To thread a ribbon trail between
The feathered mounds of evergreen.

Geraniums drape turquoise jars,
Dream-walking on the terrace rim,
And wave to gay petunias
That dance above the still pool's brim,
While on the low forget-me-nots
Tea roses shower shadow spots.

Trill of the songster curls the wind
And sails with silver swans around
The water-lilies' cool retreat . . .
A symphony of grace and sound.
The measured plaques of clover lawn
Are diamond patches at the dawn.

Here is a garden dreams have filled
With maze of magic wanderings,
In colors gently fused to stir
The troubled heart until it sings,
A garden where dream bubbles play
In rainbow beauty all the day.

No garden blooms in any land
More fair than this at Samarkand.

CORAL FAN, TELL ME A STORY

Coral fan,
Will you tell me a story?
A story to tell
When I bring my dory back to the land,
A story that lads can understand?

Sea horses sleep in an admiral's hat?
Now, I declare, just you think of that!
Heigho, but that's a story to tell!

A pirate's parrot turned into a fish?
And every swear word was changed to a swish?
Heigho, but that's a story to tell!

Rainbows are painted on fishs' sides?
And even the sponges have sweethearts and brides?
Heigho, but that's a story to tell!

And you belonged to a Spanish beauty
Whose jewels and heart were a pirate's booty?
Heigho, but yours is the story I'll tell!

SEA SHELL SONG

The sea shell's song is an eerie tune,
As weird as the drift of a sea-washed moon.

It holds the note of a single star,
Like a golden splash on an opal spar;
It holds the lull of the cradled blue
And the chant of winds that rock it, too;
It sings of bells with tongues of brine,
Of white gulls dipping in broken line,
Of fog-bound ships, and ships full-sailed,
Of reef-bare coasts and crosses nailed
To mark the places where ships are lost;
Of thundering waves by lightning crossed;
Of white bears climbing clear rainbow ice,
And whale-fountains spuming sacrifice.

The sea shell's song is an eerie tune,
As weird as the drift of a sea-washed moon.

LADY GODIVA

How dear to her the peace of Coventry!
How crafty Leofric's absurd demand!
How could he know she'd call his tricky hand
And naked ride . . . the price of leniency?
Did any risk their paltry necks to see
Their patroness ride naked through the land
Save "Peeping Tom" who left his tailor's stand
To dwell in darkness and in effigy?

Fair Lady Godiva . . . your story lives.
Through centuries you have inspired the art
Of brush and pen by vague imaginings.
Your hair . . . a garment spun. Superlatives
Of tongue and shade have struggled to impart
The thrill of beauty that your brave act brings.

CATHERINE I

Granting the power of the ruby's fire,
The dream of passion in an emerald,
Was it a crown that to your beauty called
And made an emperor your love's desire?
Of humble birth and rudimental hire,
Were you by riches and display enthralled?
Did tender tears your scattered beauty scald
When Peter lay in burial attire?

Eight times a mother, only two remained
To see your fall . . . Elizabeth and Anne.
Babes of your womb . . . were they sad recompense
For your disgrace . . . your royal conquest feigned?
Under your mad rôle, Catherine, I scan
Heart scars burning in stifled penitence.

MIDNIGHT ON THE THAMES

Haste, asleep and terrors dreaming,
Sound, exhausted stills its song,
White, above the river's scheming,
Rides the silver moon along.

Red lights burning, dully crimson,
Flares of passion, satisfied,
Deaf and mute, day's diapason
Cares not when or how it died.

WHEN GROUSE FLY OVER
THE HIGHLANDS

When grouse fly over the highlands
And wine is in the air,
And the honey-scented heather
Is sprinkled everywhere,
Oh, then I will be hearing
The skirl of pipes once more,
Climbing up the sea winds
That wind the Scottish moor.

When the yellow broom is waving
Above the plover's plume,
And the lustrous August weather
Has tossed the misty gloom,
Oh, then I will be seeing
My lad with sky-bright eyes,
Who plays the pipes at Thurso
And tells such tender lies!

HEARTS AND STRAWBERRIES

Have you ever seen a strawberry grow
Under the straw? Under the snow?
Like the full red lips of a comely lass
Kissing a star of emerald grass?
Have you seen strong hands washed brown by the
 sun
Scatter the straw and gather one?

So is a maiden's heart laid bare
When the breath of her lover stirs her hair.

SWEETS

Who steals a strawberry in Hampshire fields,
Knows well the sweetness that it yields.

Who teases kisses from a shy lad's mouth,
Knows there's no sweeter thing than youth!

MUIR WOODS

I sought a wooded shrine and found,
Chained to the consecrated ground,
An army of the ancients, hundreds strong,
Stirring the brooding wind with vaulted song;
Singing above great wounds that spread agape
In twisted torture where the flame's black rape
Had rent their sides and charred their land-locked
feet,
That could not charge the foe nor make retreat . . .
Sequoia giants, adding age to grace,
Building a temple in this quiet place.

God of the forests, let your wrath make rain,
Should fire marauders break their peace again!
This he would ask whose name these redwoods bear.
This is each spellbound pilgrim's silent prayer.

IN THE SUBWAY

A pair of mended, rust-black cotton gloves
Conceal her folded hands;
Her humble dress displays the shine
That years of wear confess.
She does not heed the careless thrusts
And shoves of eager folk;
Two baskets of white doves
Are held between her feet;
A passiveness pervades her wrinkled face;
Her eyes possess that distant light
That holds remembered loves.

I watch her leave the train,
Reluctantly, at Haymarket.
The doves . . .
What will they bring?
A fire to warm the hearth?
A loaf of bread?
Perhaps . . .
But this I know for certainty,
They will not bring her joy . . .
That fragile thing
I saw upon her thin lips . . . frozen . . . dead.

FLIRTS

Have you gowns of sunbeam silk,
Gay forsythias,
Gently Maying, playing,
Swaying in the breeze?
Have you hearts of honeyed milk
Sought by bees?

Swaying there in rhythmic motion,
I've a notion
You are gold-haired flower flirts
Born to tease!

MINUET

Three mincing steps,
Then point your toe,
Three mincing steps,
Then curtsy low . . .
In powdered wig and furbelow
They dance the minuet.

Glide lightly to the music slow,
Arms swaying lithely to and fro,
So the dainty maids of long ago
Danced the minuet.

Three mincing steps,
Then courtly bow,
Clasp tips of her soft fingers now,
With blush and sigh and whispered vow,
They dance the minuet.

Eyes lighted by an inner glow,
Lips waiting kisses to bestow,
So each frilled and fascinating beau
Danced the minuet.

THE GRAND CANYON OF ARIZONA

Though I were given centuries to live,
I could not grow to knowledge great enough
To grasp the monster glory of this huge abyss.

A super-mind conceived this phantasy
Of clay and stone,
Colored its turrets and its temple walls,
And poured the flowing fury of a stream,
In serpentine descent, to indicate
The power and the depth of moving water
And unmoving rock.

A place so vast, so intricate and still,
It challenges the mightiest of men,
Calls them to wonder and to dream,
To test their courage and their art and skill.

Who stands beside this canyon's rim
Visions a miracle of strength and beauty,
And within, knows with a gripping truth,
There dwells in silent things
A conquering might that makes a mote of him.

THE PAINTED DESERT

God spilled the very colors of the sun
Upon a wilderness of waste,
And, viewing what He had begun
With wonder and the artist's taste
For splendor, He sent rain
To wash the rugged mesas and the plain
Until the colors had been deftly blended,
Nor was, with this, His rainbow magic ended;
In curving ridges He laid lumps of paint
Like chiselled flame to catch the enraptured eye.

No modern artist's flare for unrestraint
In color, motif or relief can vie
With this great canvas painted on the sod
By that creative genius we call God.

LONG ENOUGH

I am cold . . .

Yet the fire burns on the hearth.

These hands are like frosted twigs tonight,
And my feet are colder than roots locked in ice.

A chill creeps down my spine
Like a lizard, crawling.
I'll draw the shade in that north window.

There's not a light left in the neighborhood.
Were I not a fool I'd be in bed myself . . .
I've stretched clean sheets over many a corpse . . .
Guess I'll doze here by the fire.

What time was that? Eleven?
The hand's not on it . . .
It must be the wind plays pranks
Or a mouse is gnawing at the laths.

Have the moths made food of this cashmere shawl?
It seems like a sieve tonight.

Ben Letts was here today,
Came to pick the apples,

Said Sal Cove was dead . . . died last night . . .
Old age.

"Old enough," Ben said, "Aye, old enough."

I went to school with Sal . . . a pretty girl . . .
Married John Cove when she was just sixteen.
Aye, John was comely, too!

Wonder where their boys are living now?
Went away to school and married . . .
More children, like enough.
Babies coming every day, somewhere . . .
And old folks dying . . . aye, old folks dying.
Sal had four boys . . . I never had any.
Sam was only twenty . . . no time for babies . . .
Not old enough . . . nay . . . young . . .
Young enough for the army . . .

It's a cold night for October . . .
Almost the end of the year . . . almost.

Fire's gone out . . .
Don't need the fire . . .
Most asleep now . . .
Kept awake . . . long enough . . .
Aye . . . long enough.

GOD'S CHALLENGERS

Today, I have seen mute ghosts of men,
Shaking, forever shaking;
Heard grown men's tongues
A children's babble making;
Felt the cold sweat on trembling giant hands
As to my own they clung;
Have looked in eyes, glazed as cold pottery,
Eyes, dim as lanterns in a garden strung,
Their lights most flickered out,
Yet, swaying, forever swaying.

I have seen smiles burn on a hollow cheek
Down to a dry aped grin;
Tears, welling from dark monster dams
Built doggedly within.

I have seen men, not blind,
Yet, searching, forever searching,
For something they cannot find;
Men who have done big things, alas, content
To go the useless way their feet are sent.

These are the mothers' sons
Who fought "to make the world

Safe for Democracy,”

These are the men who, silent, tread
The stony road to Calvary.

Go look at them, I say,

To you, and you, and you!

The truth is known by, oh, so few!

These are the boys we sent to war,

God's Challengers, asking, forever asking,

“What did we do it for?”

SUNSET SILHOUETTES

The sweetest scenes the windows frame
As, fleet, my train flies by,
Are silhouettes at sunset carved
Against a golden sky.

Descending cattle curve the hill,
Branchless and shattered, stark and chill,
An old oak stands in beauty still.

A man and dog, knee deep in grass,
Wait for the homing geese to pass
Above the willows' bowing mass.

Low mountains sleep in violet
Beyond a pine grove draped in jet;
Now, cut in gold, the two have met.

The sweetest scenes the windows frame
As, fleet, my train flies by,
Are silhouettes at sunset carved
Against a golden sky.

HERE IN THE LAND OF THE CACTUS

Here in the land of the cactus
I am missing the lilacs back home,
Missing the smell of the meadows
And the furrows of rich tilted loam.

I am missing the chat of the blue-jays
And the shadows of trees on the green,
The tang of the sea in my nostrils
And the flash of a sail flying clean.

Here in the land of the cactus
I am missing these things, and what's more
The comfort that comes from just knowing
Two children can skip through my door.

MY LOVER IS A PEDLER

My lover is a pedler
Of small wares,
Suspenders and shoe strings,
Ribbons and laces,
My lover is a pedler,
But who cares?
He sells them in such pretty places!

In summer by the sea,
In autumn at the park,
In winter on the narrow streets
Where children play till dark.

My lover is a pedler
Of small wares,
Safety pins and needles
And knick-knacks from a cart.
My lover is a pedler,
But who cares?
Not all the ladies' glances can buy his heart!

TO A COQUETTE

A bouquet, dear lady,
Before I go.

The shadow that curves its slender stem
 With subtle grace about your throat;
The laughing note of your lilting song
 Caught on a cobweb beam of light;
The smile that makes of your saint-like mouth
 A roguish imp in wayward flight;
And a baffled heart, like a whirling moth
 Singed by the flame and set afloat.

I place them now in your empty hands
With fingers cold as snow.

MAY CARNIVAL

May holds its carnival, while I
Thrill as the revellers pass by. . . .
Thrill to the curve of a ruffled stream,
To the spreading flame of a maple tree,
To the drooping willows' dainty scheme
And stark birches' silver witchery.
Thrill to the wild plum's rosy blush,
To the chain of gold the meadows wear,
To the purple crown on the lilac bush
And the cherry's powdered pompadour.
To the trillium clowns in red and white
And the cornflower dancers' slender grace,
To the violet regiments' left and right
And the apple orchard's tent of lace.

May holds its carnival, while I
Thrill as the revellers pass by.

OH, I HAVE PLOWED THE LONG DAY

Oh, I have plowed the long day,
The moon is at the full,
It peers above the hill-top
And paints the homeward pull.

Oh, I have plowed the long day,
Aweary? Not my feet,
For cheery is the hearthstone
With warmth of blazing peat.

Oh, I have plowed the long day,
Heigho, but life is fair,
And aching arms are quick forgot
With you beside me there!

OUT OF THE WORLD

Day, I will carry you in my heart
Beyond the sunset's gold or grey,
Day, I will carry you in my heart
Out of the world . . . away!

You were like a young lad
Dreaming on a hill;
You were something stars had caught
To brightly spill.

You were swift and beautiful,
Beautiful and gay . . .
Gay as a bird on claret wing
Singing the hours away.

Day, I will carry you in my heart
Into the dawn of death's white day,
Day I will carry you in my heart
Out of the world . . . away!

EPITAPH

I have masked my grief
And stilled my laughter,
I have stayed belief,
I await the hereafter.

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